

Board of Trustees Strategic Planning Process Update

September 2025



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Background and Purpose

Northeastern Illinois University launched its Strategic Planning process in August 2024. The University is committed to an inclusive process that engages the NEIU community to create a Strategic Plan aligned with and driven by NEIU's Mission, Vision, and Values. The overarching goal is to develop an evergreen plan focused on Stability, Rebuilding, and Growth.

NEIU's last Strategic Plan was created in 2008 and refreshed in 2014. NEIU's next Strategic Plan will guide the University forward, enabling NEIU to strengthen its impact as a Minority-Serving and Hispanic-Serving institution committed to providing a high-quality and accessible education.

Three major frameworks will inform NEIU's Strategic Planning:

1. Best Practices for HSIs and MSIs
2. Core Components of Excelencia Framework
3. Data-Informed Methods and Analysis

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External Resources and Expertise Supporting NEIU's Strategic Planning Process

Northeastern engaged expert consultants, publications, and reviewed peer benchmarks to inform its strategic planning process.

Professional Consultation

Dr. Darlene Schlenbecker

Consultant with extensive experience in strategic planning, assessment, institutional research, and accreditation. Over two decades in higher education leadership roles in admissions, student affairs, faculty development, and planning. Former NEIU adjunct faculty member (2000–2007); holds a B.A. in Psychology from NEIU. Led or supported the development of multiple university strategic plans.

Key Planning Frameworks Referenced by Dr. Schlenbecker

Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations – Allison & Kaye

Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations – Bryson

From Strategy to Change: Implementing the Plan in Higher Education – Rowley & Sherman

Strategic Planning in Higher Education: Theory and Practice – Sevier

A Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in Higher Education – Karen E. Hinton, PhD

Trends for Higher Education – Apryl Motley, CAE



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External Resources and Expertise Supporting NEIU's Strategic Planning Process

Northeastern has engaged expert consultants, and reviewed external publications, and peer benchmarks to inform its strategic planning process. These efforts reflect a commitment to adopting nationally recognized practices and aligning with Education sector-leading insights.

Additional External Advisors and Insights

Scott Ochander, Chief Client Solutions Officer, Carnegie

National expert in higher education strategy, enrollment management, and change management.

Consultant to University Presidents

Delivers strategic counsel and provides insights to prominent higher education institutions nationwide.

Key Industry Resources/Reported Consulted

Deloitte Center for Higher Education Excellence, 2025 Higher Education Trends

Society for College and University Planning (SCUP), 2024 Trends Inside Higher Education; 2024 Trends Outside Higher Education

Society for College and University Planning (SCUP), Strategic Planning in Higher Education (2022)

Lightcast subscription - Labor market data: Top skillsets and jobs

Sample Peer Benchmarking Reviewed

The NEIU Strategic Planning Leadership Team also reviewed strategic plans and institutional priorities from Illinois public universities, including:

University of Illinois at Chicago: [Chancellor's Priorities](#)

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: [Archived Strategic Plan](#)



Process Timeline

The strategic planning process is a comprehensive, multi-phase process that engaged stakeholders across the University, leveraging data, community insight, and best practices in higher education strategic planning.



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Goals Overview: A Data-Informed, Collaborative Process

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SWOT Survey

A campus-wide survey gathered input on **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)** from faculty, staff, and administrators to assess NEIU's internal capabilities and external positioning.

Data Summits

NEIU hosted **four in-person** and **one virtual Data Summit**, offering structured forums where participants discussed institutional data in small-group settings. Each session followed a *World Café* model to allow broad participation and dynamic, rotating conversations across 14 key topics.

Stakeholder Surveys

Survey solicited **student and stakeholder perspectives** on the University's current performance and future priorities, ensuring student voice was central to the planning process.

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Goals Overview: A Data-Informed, Collaborative Process

After the draft goals were developed, additional Roundtable Discussions were held:

Roundtable Discussions

Roundtables were held with College Advisory Boards, Board of Trustees, Foundation, NEIU community members to discuss the Draft Goals and to receive feedback.

The Five Draft Strategic Goals reflect **broad community input**, data-informed discussion, and guidance from experienced consultants and national resources. NEIU's inclusive approach ensures the resulting plan will be both **mission-aligned and future-focused**, guiding the University's priorities of: **Stability, Rebuilding, and Growth** over the next five years.

Goal 1: Strengthen Student Success and Retention

Improve student progression, engagement, and persistence to support the success of NEIU's diverse student body. This goal will ensure students have the resources, support, and sense of belonging needed to thrive from initial enrollment through graduation.

Goal Leads: Claudia Mercado, Interim Vice President for Enrollment Management
Terry C. Mena, Ph.D., Vice President and Dean of Students for Student Affairs

Goal 2: Enhance Curricular Innovation, Scholarship, and Faculty/Staff Excellence

Advance program innovation, expand learning modalities as appropriate, and provide faculty and staff development to meet evolving student and workforce needs. This goal affirms NEIU's dedication to academic excellence and continuous professional growth.

Goal Leads: R. Shayne Cofer, Ph.D., Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Claudia Mercado, Interim Vice President for Enrollment Management

Goal 3: Improve Infrastructure for a Sustainable, Accessible, and Student-Centered University

Strengthen NEIU's physical spaces, policies, and technologies to create a sustainable, accessible, and student-centered campus environment. This goal will enhance the student experience, improve institutional effectiveness, and ensure the university's long-term capacity to serve its community.

Goal Leads: Terry C. Mena, Ph.D., Vice President and Dean of Students for Student Affairs
Nicki B. Bazer, Interim General Counsel

Goal 4: Elevate NEIU's Identity as an Urban University with Regional Impact

Increase the visibility and recognition of NEIU's programs, alumni, and community impact. Leverage strategic marketing and communications to position NEIU as a diverse, inclusive, and influential regional university.

Goal Leads: Christopher Childers, Executive Director of Marketing
Blanca Jara, Interim Executive Director of Government Relations

Goal 5: Advance Fiscal Stability and Growth

Diversify revenue streams, building strategic partnerships, and supporting enrollment growth to ensure long-term financial sustainability. This goal will secure the resources needed to invest in students, faculty, staff, and the future of the university.

Goal Leads: Beni Ortiz, Vice President for Finance and Administration
Leisl Downey, Vice President for Advancement

Next Steps: Developing a Strategic Plan Goal Team

Each Goal Team will be comprised of:

- **Two Cabinet Members** serving as Goal Leaders
- **Designated Subject Matter Experts**, identified by the Goal Leaders based on job roles and responsibilities
- **Strategic Planning Core Team Volunteers**, selected from the FY25 volunteer list
- **Additional Volunteers***
- **Board of Trustee Liaison**, with each Goal Team assigned a Board member to provide guidance on progress, tactics, and KPIs

*If you are interested in serving as a volunteer, please contact both Goal Leaders directly.

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Next Steps: Development of Goal Teams

Commitment

Serving on a Goal Team is a meaningful way to shape the future of our institution and ensure the success of our 2026–2029 Strategic Plan. Each team will begin meeting in **September through mid-November** and is expected to meet **weekly to biweekly** for **1–2 hours** per session. In addition to attending meetings, members may be asked to review documents, provide feedback between sessions, and help shape tactics and key performance indicators (KPIs).

This commitment represents both an opportunity to contribute your expertise and a responsibility to collaborate with colleagues across the university. We value the time and perspective of every member and recognize that your efforts will directly inform the strategies and measurable outcomes that guide our institution forward.

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Next Steps: Development of Action Steps and KPIs

Goal Team Members

- Each goal team should have five to ten members
- Selected for knowledge, role, and impact
- Inclusive of diverse voices and experiences
- Support brainstorming, goal, and tactic drafting

Goal Team Responsibilities

- Each team will develop the tactics and KPI's to support each goal, ensuring alignment with NEIU's mission, values and external context
- Each tactic should be *Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound*

- Tactics should address how it supports NEIU's diverse student population
- Each tactic should include a measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) within a 5-year timeline

Goal Team Operating Principles

- Ensure **transparency** with campus-wide updates
- Apply an **equity lens** to all recommendations
- Operate by **consensus** and record progress in meeting notes

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Board of Trustee Involvement

Board Member Opportunities for Engagement:

2:1 Meetings with Board members and NEIU President will provide the opportunity for deeper engagement and more formative discussion of action steps/tactics and KPIs being mapped to the goals in the Strategic Plan

Board Member Liaison:

1-2 Board of Trustees volunteers will be asked to participate by providing consultation to the Goal Team Leads during the development of the action/steps and KPIs being mapped to the goals in the Strategic Plan

Framework:

- *Timeline/Time Commitment:* September-December; Bi-weekly consultations @ 2-4 hours/month
- *Role/Responsibility:* To receive progress updates; serve as resource; to provide feedback, insights, ask questions for consideration

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Next Steps Timeline

- **August 29, 2025** – Identify Group Team Leads
- **September 12, 2025** – Identify Goal Teams
- **September 18, 2025 – Finalized Goals Presented to Board of Trustees**
- **September 19, 2025** – Goal Team Orientation
- **Week of September 22, 2025** – First Goal Team Meetings begin
- **Ongoing (September–October)** – Each Goal Team should plan to meet at least twice per week
- **October 2025** – Draft tactics and KPIs; hold campus/community listening sessions
- **November 2025** – Refine deliverables with stakeholder feedback; prepare and submit consolidated report
- **November 20, 2025 – Update Presented to Board of Trustees**
- **December 2025 - Finalize Goals**
- **January 2026 - Adoption** of the final strategic plan document completed and approved

FY2027 Legislative Preview



Legislative Outlook

Building Legislative Support Through Narrative and Advocacy

- **FY26 Outcomes:** 1% base increase for public universities + 2% discretionary funding; \$400K new capital appropriation (Sen. Guzmán) + \$1M in ARTP funding/reappropriations for NEIU.
- **Policy Landscape:** Adequate & Equitable Public University Funding Act gained momentum but stalled; Community College Baccalaureate debate continues.
- **Fiscal Outlook:** State faces major pressures (Transit Bill, Medicaid, federal funding cuts), creating a constrained environment for higher education funding.



Legislative Lobby Goals

- Strengthen NEIU's Narrative: Elevate the impact of state appropriations on student success, higher education, and workforce development.
- Rebuild Legislative Relationships: Engage Black, Latino, and Asian Caucuses while broadening visibility among all legislators.
- Advance Equity in Funding: Support the Adequate & Equitable Public University Funding Act; monitor risks from community college baccalaureate proposals while fostering transfer partnerships.
- Support Board Engagement: Equip Trustees with advocacy tools and key opportunities to reinforce NEIU's message.

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Legislative Requests

Driving Student Success, Innovation, and Institutional Growth

- Student Success and Retention
- Enrollment Growth and Institutional Innovation
- Technological Infrastructure

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Advocacy Through Engagement

Opportunities to Advance NEIU's Legislative & Community Priorities

- **Legislative Caucus Engagement:** Participation in IL Latino Caucus Foundation (Raíces Conference, Leadership Summit, Gala) and IL Black Caucus Foundation Policy Summit to strengthen relationships with legislative leaders.
- **Policy & Community Forums:** Engagement in the Latino Policy Forum's *Fireside Chat on Undocumented Student Success* and other convenings that highlight NEIU's leadership in equity and student support.

Resources: February 2025 - NEIU Trustee Advocacy Memorandum & Fall 2025 – BOT Legislative & Community Engagement Opportunities

Thank You!